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Precautions urged during hot weather

Richland, Wash.: With temperatures at or above the 100 degree mark, Benton County Emergency Services urges residents to watch out for heat exhaustion and heat stroke during the hot weather. The elderly, chronically ill and very young need special attention.

In addition, as a result of last night's severe thunderstorms, some areas are without power this morning. Residents in those areas should keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full and the door remains closed).

Taking a few simple precautions can avoid health problems associated with heat. These include:

1) Change your routine.

- Avoid strenuous activity during the day. Schedule strenuous activity during the early morning when it is coolest.
- If possible, don't use the oven. Eat cool foods such as salads.

2) Stay cool and hydrated.

- Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun. If you need to work outside, take more breaks and use the shade to cool off when not working. Wear a hat and use sunscreen.
- Take cool baths and showers or sponge off with cool water. If you don't have air conditioning, go to someplace that does, like a library, senior center, movie theater or a local store.
- Drink plenty of cool, non-alcoholic beverages. Alcohol makes dehydration worse.

3) Monitor yourself, family and neighbors.

- Know the signs of more serious heat illnesses. Heat exhaustion starts with weakness, nausea, dizziness and profuse sweating. Heat stroke is characterized by a high body temperature, lack of sweating and physical collapse.
- Some medicines can make you more sensitive to heat stress. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Check in on older friends and relatives living alone. The most common victims of heat stroke are elderly people living alone. Invite them to visit an air conditioned library or movie with you.

Heat related illnesses are easily prevented. Enjoy a change in routine, let the weather dictate how hard you work and exercise, and watch out for family, friends and neighbors.

Residents should also ensure that pets have access to plenty of fresh water and a place to get out of the hot sun.

A final reminder, DO NOT leave children or pets in a locked car. Temperatures will quickly increase to levels that can lead to illness or death.

For additional information, please see our web page at www.bces.wa.gov

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